

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
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R 070845Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8296
INFO AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY OSLO
AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM
COMICEDEFOR KEFLAVIK IC
CINCLANT NORFOLK VA
CINCEUR VAIHINGEN GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 REYKJAVIK 0476

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS PINT, IC
SUBJECT: PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE TRIES TO GET ITS ACT TOGETHER

SUMMARY: WITH LESS THAN THREE MONTHS TO GO BEFORE NATIONAL ELECTIONS FOR-LEFT PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE (PA) HAVING MORE TROUBLE GETTING ITSELF ORGANIZED THAN OTHER MAJOR PARTIES. LEADERSHIP CHANGES, INTERNAL BICKERING, AND ABSENCE OF SINGLE ISSUE TO GALVANIZE SUPPORTERS HAVE BROUGHT PARTY TO PRESENT STATE. DESPITE ITS PROBLEMS, PA HAS LARGE BLOC OF HARD-CORE PARTY MEMBERS WHO WILL GO WITH PA ALL THE WAY. ALSO, BECAUSE OF VOTER DISENCHANTMENT WITH INCUMBENTS, PA'S STATUS AS OPPOSITION PARTY AND AS CLEAR ALTERNATIVE TO PRESENT GOVERNMENT SHOULD ATTRACT SOME VOTES. NONETHELESS PARTY NEEDS TO SOLVE ITS INTERNAL PROBLEMS BEFORE IT WILL BE ABLE TO EXPLOIT EFFECTIVELY ECONOMIC ISSUES WHICH ARE OF CONCERN TO ELECTORATE.
END SUMMARY.

1. WITH ELECTIONS FOR NEW ALTHING LITTLE MORE THAN
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ELEVEN WEEKS AWAY, ONLY PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE OF FOUR MAJOR PARTIES HAS NOT COMPLETED COMPOSITION OF ITS CANDIDATE LISTS IN ICELAND'S EIGHT CONSTITUENCIES. PA HAS FAILED TO COME UP WITH LIST
IN REYKJAVIK, THE PARTY'S FLAGSHIP CONSTITUENCY
AND COUNTRY'S LARGEST. ONE REASON IS THAT PARTY'S INTERNAL PROBLEMS, EXEMPLIFIED BY DIFFICULTY IN CHOOSING

NEW CHAIRMAN (77 REYKJAVIK 1716 NOTAL). HAVE STILL NOT BEEN COMPLETELY RESOLVED, BUT THERE ARE OTHERS. PREVIOUS PA LIST FOR REYKJAVIK HEADED BY TWO MPS WHO HAVE BEEN IN POOR HEALTH FOR SOME TIME. MAGNUS KJARTANSSON, FORMER GOVERNMENT MINISTER WHO HEADED LAST LIST, HAS LATELY BEEN SOMETHING OF EMBARRASSMENT FOR PA, AND ONLY ON MARCH 31 DID HE TAKE HIMSELF OUT OF RUNNING FOR CANDIDACY. EDVARD SIGURDSSON IS MORE RELUCTANT TO LEAVE, ALTHOUGH HEALTH AND AGE (67) MAKE HIM TARGET OF YOUNGER PARTY MEMBERS SEEKING BIGGER PIECE OF ACTION. THIRD ON LIST IS MP SVAVA JAKOBSDOTTIR, AND FOR ALL OF PA'S CHAMPIONING OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS, PARTY NOT ANXIOUS TO MOVE HER TO HIGHER POSITION ON LIST.

2. PA IS ALSO UNDECIDED ON WHETHER TO REWARD NEW CONVERTS, SUCH AS OLAFUR RAGNAR GRIMSSON, HEAD OF UNIVERSITY POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT, BY GIVING THEM CHANCE TO RUN UNDER PARTY BANNER. PA HARDLINERS ARGUE THAT POSSIBLE OPPORTUNISTS (GRIMSSON, FOR EXAMPLE, HAS ALREADY SOUGHT OFFICE IN TWO OTHER PARTIES) SHOULD BE MADE TO SERVE PERIOD OF "APPRENTICESHIP" BEFORE THEY WIN RIGHT TO RUN AS MEMBERS OF PARTY.

3. PA, LIKE OTHER PARTIES, FOCUSING ON ECONOMIC ISSUE IN ELECTION CAMPAIGN, BUT UNLIKE SITUATION IN PREVIOUS YEARS, IT IS HAVING TROUBLE COMING UP WITH CONVINCING CONFIDENTIAL

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ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS TO CURE NATION'S ILLS. AS PARTNER IN FORMER COALITION GOVERNMENT FOUR YEARS AGO, PA PERFORMANCE ON ECONOMIC, FINANCIAL, AND SOCIAL ISSUES WAS NOT GOOD. (DURING THAT GOVERNMENT, INFLATION RATE ROSE FROM EIGHT PERCENT TO FORTY PERCENT; THEN-MINISTER OF INDUSTRY KJARTANSSON HIMSELF APPROVED MISCONCEIVED KRAFLA PROJECT; AND ECONOMY WAS IN SHAMBLES BY 1974.) PA HAS THEREFORE REMAINED VULNERABLE TO CRITICISM ON THIS SCORE. ELECTORATE ALSO APPEARS TO BE TIRED OF LABOR STRIFE AND APPEARS UNDECIDED AS TO WHETHER PA INCLUSION IN NEW GOVERNMENT WOULD PROMISE LABOR PEACE OR ENCOURAGE UNIONS IN GREATER MILITANCY. ISSUE OF ICELAND DEFENSE FORCE AND "FOREIGN OCCUPATION" REMAINS GOOD STANDBY AND WILL PROBABLY BE INVOKED BY PA IN APPEAL TO ICELANDIC XENOPHOBIA. ALL INDICATIONS, HOWEVER, ARE THAT ECONOMIC POCKETBOOK ISSUES WILL BE PARAMOUNT WITH VOTERS, AND WITH ITS LISTS STILL INCOMPLETE, PARTY ALSO FINDS ITSELF WITHOUT PROGRAM ON WHICH CREDIBLE APPEAL TO ELECTORATE CAN BE DEVELOPED.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 REYKJAVIK 0476

4. MEANTIME, PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE EXPRESSING CONCERN
OVER THREAT TO ITS RIGHT FLANK POSED BY SOCIAL DEMO-
CRATS. PA EDGINESS INDICATED BY INCREASING ATTACKS OF
PARTY ORGAN THJODVILJINN ON SDP AND ITS LEADING VOTE-
GETTERS. PA HAS CONSISTENTLY MAINTAINED THAT
PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE IS ONLY REAL ALTERNATIVE TO TWO
GOVERNMENT PARTIES, BUT ITS ATTACKS ON SDP BELIE ITS
CONFIDENCE IN POPULAR ACCEPTANCE OF THAT CLAIM.
SOCIAL DEMOCRATS HAVE MANY ATTRACTIVE NEW PERSONALI-
TIES WHILE PA CANDIDATES ARE AGING AND LOSING THEIR
APPEAL FOR YOUNG; WHEN CHALLENGED BY NEW FACES, OLD-
TIMERS WHO STILL HEAD PA FEEL THREATENED. IN ADDITION,
VOTES THAT WENT TO ORGANIZATION OF LIBERALS AND
LEFTISTS (OLL) IN 1974 ARE VIRTUALLY UP FOR GRABS;
HAVING WATCHED FORMER OLL CANDIDATES DRIFT OVER TO
SDP, PA FEARS ITS POTENTIAL GAINS FROM OLL VOTERS WILL
BE REDUCED BY SOCIAL DEMOCRATS.

5. DESPITE THESE PROBLEMS, PA HAS MANY STRENGTHS THAT
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CANNOT BE OVERLOOKED. AS A CENTRALIZED PARTY WHICH

HAS SELECTED ITS CANDIDATES BEHIND CLOSED DOORS, IT IS ONLY MAJOR PARTY WHICH HAS NOT FACED BRUISING PRIMARIES OVER LAST FEW MONTHS. HARDLINE LEFTISTS WHO MAKE UP SIGNIFICANT PART OF PA HAVE NOWHERE ELSE TO GO AND, IF THEY WERE DISENCHANTED, THEY WOULD BE LESS INCLINED TO SIT OUT ELECTION THAN THEIR COUNTERPARTS IN OTHER PARTIES WOULD BE. THERE ARE ALSO INDICATIONS THAT YOUNGER AND OLDER WINGNS OF PARTY, UNDER PRESSURE OF TIME, HAVE MADE SOME COMPROMISES ON CANDIDATES IN ORDER TO CLEAR THE DECKS FOR OTHER ELECTORAL PREPARATIONS. WITHDRAWAL OF MAGNUS KJARTANSSON WILL HELP. BIGGEST ADVANTAGE OF PA, HOWEVER, IS FACT THAT IT HAS BEEN IN OPPOSITION TO GOVERNMENT COMPOSED OF COUNTRY'S TWO LARGEST PARTIES. GOVERNMENT HAS NOT LIVED UP TO ITS ANTI-INFLATION PROMISES OVER LAST FOUR YEARS AND EVEN THOUGH PAS HAS YET TO COME UP WITH CREDIBLE ALTERNATIVE TO MEASURES BELATEDLY DEVELOPED BY GOI, BOTH OPPOSITION PA AND SDP SHOULD BENEFIT FROM VOTER DISENCHANTMENT.

6. TO REAP ITS REWARD, PA WILL HAVE TO GET ITS HOUSE IN ORDER. CONTINUING CONFLICTS WILL HAVE TO BE PUT ASIDE; VACANCIES IN PARTY LISTS WILL SOON HAVE TO BE FILLED SINCE TIME IS RUNNING OUT; ELECTORAL PROGRAMS FOCUSING ON ECONOMIC AND LABOR ISSUES WILL NEED TO BE DEVISED; AND PA WILL THEN HAVE TO TAKE ITS SHOW ON THE ROAD. PARTY SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO THIS, EVEN IN TIME REMAINING. EXPECTATION THAT PA WILL DO SO IS INDICATED BY CURRENT ASSUMPTION THAT PARTY WILL GARNER 20 PERCENT OF ELECTORATE FOR FIRST TIME AND THEREBY PICK UP TWO, OR PERHAPS MORE, SEATS. THIS WOULD INCREASE ITS ALTHING REPRESENTATION TO THIRTEEN OR MORE

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AND CONFIRM ITS CLAIM TO BE SOLE LEFTIST ALTERNATIVE IN ICELAND.
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Message Attributes

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